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ABSTRACT

Education is a national concern in Zimbabwe because prior to independence in 1980, Africans were formally and informally prevented from sharing in the educational opportunities that were available to Whites. Zimbabwe is a young country that has made great strides since independence. They have touched large numbers of people with beginning education programs. However, several problems remain: (1) teacher shortages; (2) large class size; (3) limited books and materials; and (4) need for evaluation of the literacy program. Zimbabwe's participation in an international literacy study will provide information and suggestions for identifying strengths and weaknesses of the national education program. To date there has not been a study to see whether the newly literate people sustain their reading skill by continuous reading or for that matter what they are reading. An evaluation is necessary to see if there is a relationship between the new literacy and productivity. (RS)

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INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION

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ATLANTA GEORGIA

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A FULBRIGHT LECTURER'S VIEW OF READING RELATED ISSUES IN ZIMBABWE

Audrey Williams, May 1990

The Summer of 1989 was one of the most exciting and rewarding for my family and me. I received a Fulbright Award to lecture in the School of Education at the University of Zimbabwe. My daughter who was a sixth grader had an opportunity to accompany me and attend school in Harare, the capital. We were able to share American culture and learned a great deal about the culture of Southern Africa. Since I teach college developmental reading courses I was naturally interested in the literacy issue.

In order to understand the contemporary literacy status of Zimbabwe we must briefly look at the history of this new nation. Zimbabwe emerged on the international scene in 1980 as an independent nation after almost a century of colonial rule. Zimbabweans we met told us that the struggle for their freedom started at the beginning of the colonial period. The essence of colonial rule was to keep the African in a subservient position. In order to maintain the class system created by the colonial society education was limited to the white minority. The African child was formally and informally discouraged from entering school. The Education Act of 1930 made education compulsory for white children between th ages of seven to fifteen years of age. This included a two year infant school for six and seven year olds, and primary education from ages eight to twelve. For those who were unable to attend school there were correspondence schools and educational radio broadcasts. For the African child education was not compulsory, and since many African families did not own radios, it was common place for African children to have little or no primary education. At the secondary level, while entrance to the six year secondary school level serving the thirteen to eighteen year old age group was automatic for the white children, African children sat rigid terminal exams at standard six or grade seven level, form two and form four levels (That would be approximately junior and senior level high school in the United States.) The full impact of the system is demonstrated in this brief summary of the fortunes of a 1952 grade 1 class:

> "Of the 84,444 children who entered grade 1 in 1952, only 10,921 reached the last grade of the primary education segment and of those only

> 1,919 went to secondary school; of those pupils only 386 reached O level and only 56 reached the pre-university upper sixth form. On the other hand, more than half of the European population had 10-11 years of education, and a third had even more." (T.T. Moyana, 1989, p.44)

Theoretically the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland provided education "for men and women of all races," practically a negligible number of African students ever ended up there. For instance, in 1959, the University College enrolled a total of 188 students out of which 154 were whites, 32 were Africans, one was colored and one Asian. (F.Parker, 1961 p. 289) This is in a country where the black-white ratio was 12:1, or an overwhelming African majority comprising 7.7 million of the Federation's 8 million inhabitants. (F. Parker, 1961 p.286)

Independence and Literacy

When independence was achieved the Zimbabwean government immediately made education the nation's first priority. An adult literacy campaign was launched and free public schooling was made available to all children regardless of race. The school that my daughter attended was integrated with children of all races who were from middle class families. In the poor communities because of economics we find schools that are all African. The government has been able to keep education a priority in budgetary terms. Each year since independence education has been the largest single portion of the national budget. However there are national education problems that must still be addressed. Although there are many new school buildings in rural areas there is a national teacher shortage, at a time when there are large numbers of adults and children who do not have reading, writing or numeracy skills.

Approximately 60% of the African population lives in rural poverty. In order to change their way of life the first order of business is to get an education for the adults and the children in the community. I visited rural schools with novice teachers who had very few materials. There were no discipline problems, because, I think, the students realize the seriousness of getting an education. One of my colleagues at the University of Zimbabwe did not agree with my analysis of why the rural classes were so orderly. She said that the rural children were physically too tired to make mischief in class, because many of them do chores before walking miles to school.

Teacher Shortages

There was a rapid rise in enrollments after independence. During the first three years after independence "primary and secondary education enrollments had increased by 65 percent, and the number of teachers had not grown correspondingly. In fact, the number of untrained teachers in secondary schools had increased from 5 percent in 1980 to 11 percent in 1982, and in primary schools from 28 percent in 1980 to 47 percent in 1982. In 1982, in real numbers, secondary school education had 719 untrained teachers, and primary education had 21,768. Trained secondary teachers included an undetermined number of expatriates from Great Britain, Canada, Australia and Mauritius. Another disturbing finding was that some personnel in teachers colleges had inadequate qualifications" (Chikombah 1984, p.17)

The government tried many ways of speeding up the teacher training process, while providing education. In Zimbabwe school is all year long in cycles of three months classes followed by a month vacation. In some cases, novice teachers working toward a teaching certificate would attend classes at the University or a Teacher College in between sessions. Some of the people who are teaching attended college but did not take teacher education classes.

Adult education classes were offered in convenient locations often in the evening after people completed the day's work. Some teachers were able to supplement their salaries by teaching in an evening adult education center. The government estimates that there are more than 2.5 million illiterate adults. The Minister of Primary and Secondary Education, Fay Chung, plans for the teacher education program to be improved and believes that "every teacher must do some form of community development. It is a part of their job to link their knowledge and skills to those needs of the community calling for such knowledge and skills. Every teacher must participate in a community development programme each year, and I think literacy and adult education are key areas." (F. Chung 1984 p.5)

The International Literacy Study

Evaluation of the literacy effort in Zimbabwe was started for the first time in 1990. Zimbabwe along with 40 other countries including the United States is participating in an international literacy study . The study consists of two level of testing; nine year olds and 14 year olds. Each country is responsible for selecting the number of children to be used based on a formula created by an international

committee. For economic as well as practical reasons Zimbabwe decided to just test the 14 year olds since they can give a national picture of the effectiveness of the country's literacy program. Although English is the official language members of the Zimbabwe Literacy Committee felt that it was important to use some of the limited funds on translating the test into Shona and Ndeble. The definition of literacy for Zimbabwe allows the person to function with ease in his or her local community using the language of his/her choice or region to communicate by writing, reading or speaking. The new literacy must also have a sense of future and must give the Zimbabwean the foundation to be able to more into other languages, if necessary, in order to compete in the world market. Zimbabwe will use a representative sample of schools in the Harare area to pilot the tests in English, Shona and Ndebele. Shona is the language that eighty percent of the Zimbabwean speak and the remainder speak Ndebele and a few other minor languages. The current practice is to teach children and adults, in the local language, in the literacy programs and at the elementary school level. English is taught as a second language in many of the rural schools. By the middle grades all work is done in English which is considered the official language. Using the internationally agreed upon sampling technique, children from all regions will be tested with the exception of the special education groups adult literacy groups, and schools for the handicapped. Pilot tests will be administered and the actual testing is scheduled to take place in 1990. The final national report will be completed by 1993.

Reading Research

Although Zimbabwe is a young nation there has been an effort on the part of faculty to do scholarly research and amass data about reading. Since the mid seventies some research for the purpose of improving reading in primary and secondary schools has been done by individual teachers and some college faculty. The Harare Reading Council (HRC) is an active group whose membership includes teachers, lecturers, publishers, headmasters, curriculum developers and Education Ministry officials. HRC conducts workshops at least three times a year, organizes cultural events where material is read and put to practical use, hosts meetings where internationally known reading specialists are featured, and provides opportunities for educators to share research results. In addition the HRC publishes News and Views, a research and methodology journal. The Bulletin of the Associate College Center publishes articles on a wide range of subjects and regularly devotes space to articles about reading. For example, Joyce Childs' research on reading in Zimbabwe has

identified many issues that relate to solving the literacy problem. In 1986 Childs discovered that there was no systematic approach to the teaching of reading to teacher trainees. Each college had its own system and in each case very little time was devoted to teaching reading skills. She made several recommendations for improving reading teacher trainees' instruction. Her investigation provoked thought and action. Childs (1986), Makuyana (1985) and Roller (1986) have written about ways teachers can motivate Zimbabwean children to read making use of available resources.

Conclusion

In order to appreciate the present we must know the past for then we can plan for the future. Education is a national concern in Zimbabwe because prior to independence Africans were formally and informally prevented from sharing in the education opportunities that were available to whites. Zimbabwe is a young country that has made great strides since the independence. They have touched large numbers of people with beginning education programs. In spite of the gains and the improvement since colonial days there are problems yet to be solved. For example, the issues of teacher shortages, large classes, limited books and materials and a need to evaluate the literacy program all must be addressed.

The national literacy study data will provide information and suggestions for identifying the strengths and the weaknesses of the national education program. To date there has not been a study to see whether the newly literate people sustain their reading skill by continuous reading or for that matter what are they reading. There needs to be an evaluation to see if there is a relationship between the new literacy and productivity.

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